

## VISN 4 MIRECC Bulletin

Highlights of recent activity and accomplishments of our MIRECC faculty

### Announcements

**Volume 2, Issue 1**

#### Organizational News

##### 2009 MIRECC Advisory Board Meeting

On September 15<sup>th</sup>, the VISN 4 MIRECC 2009 Advisory Board Meeting was held at the VA Pittsburgh Healthcare System. Attendees at this full day meeting included representatives from VA Central Office and VA clinical leaders and administrators from the VISN as well as our hub sites of Pittsburgh and Philadelphia. The day was a successful review of our progress over the last year. We were able to present four new project areas and get helpful input and feedback. Thanks to all for making our MIRECC a huge success.

##### Under Secretary Visit

On October 15<sup>th</sup>, the new Deputy Under Secretary for Health for Operations and Management, Mr. Schoenhard, and the Acting Under Secretary of Health, Dr. Gerald Cross, visited the Philadelphia VAMC. Their visit included a briefing on the VISN 4 MIRECC. The presentation was well received and there was genuine excitement about some of our research projects.

##### Radio Interview

On October 19<sup>th</sup> **Mark Salzer, PhD**, was interviewed on a Philadelphia NPR affiliate radio station about current mental health policies and practices pertaining to adults with serious mental illness.

##### **Please join us in welcoming the new fellows that started this year at the Philadelphia site of the VISN 4 MIRECC:**

**Kevin Connolly, MD**, started the MIRECC Fellowship in July where he continues to conduct clinical trials of deep brain stimulation and transcranial magnetic stimulation. Dr. Connolly received his Medical Degree from Temple University's School of Medicine, and completed his Residency in Psychiatry at the University of Pennsylvania where he served as Chief Resident. Currently, Ryan is examining biomarkers for depression and risk factors for treatment resistance in mood disorders. His primary mentor is Dr. David Oslin.

**Regina Szucs, MD, PhD**, began the MIRECC Fellowship in July. Her research interests include utilizing neuroimaging techniques to examine substance abuse. Dr. Szucs received her MD/PhD from the University of Texas Medical Branch in Galveston, Texas. She then completed her psychiatry residency at the University of Pennsylvania. Her primary mentor is Dr. David Oslin.

**Theresa Schmitz, PhD**, started as a Fellow in September to continue her research on couples with a focus on the psychiatric problems of returning veterans and their families. Dr. Schmitz recently completed her doctoral degree at the University of Maryland, Baltimore County, and a clinical psychology internship at the San Diego Veterans Affairs Hospital. Her primary mentor is Dr. Steven Sayers.

##### **Please also join us in welcoming the newest staff member in Pittsburgh:**

**G. Keilan Rickard, MA**, joined the Pittsburgh site as a Study Coordinator/Psychology Technician. He holds two masters degrees in mental health related fields and is working on his PhD in clinical psychology at Duquesne University. His areas of interest include the serious persistent mental illness population and mixed-methods research involving discourse analysis.

### Research Accomplishments/News

##### **Wade Berrettini, MD, PhD**, Grant Award: **Genetics of Nicotine Dependence**, NIH (R01)

The goal of this study is to identify the functional effects of nicotinic receptor subunit alleles which increase risk for nicotine addiction through the study of post-mortem human brain expression of genotypically-defined samples and analysis of promoter function.

##### **Lauren Matukaitis Broyles, PhD, RN**, 2 Grant Awards:

###### **1) Implementing a Nurse Training Program for Alcohol Screening and Intervention in Inpatient Settings**, VA QUERI

The focus of this study is to design, implement, and evaluate a nurse training program to increase alcohol screening and intervention in the inpatient care setting (RN-SBIRT).

###### **2) Patient Acceptability of Nurse-Delivered Alcohol Screening, Brief Intervention and Referral to Treatment in the Inpatient General Medical Setting**, American Nurses Foundation (ANF)

The focus of this study is to evaluate the patient acceptability of a nurse-delivered alcohol screening, brief intervention, and referral to treatment (RN-SBIRT) for hospitalized medical inpatients.

##### **Shahzad Mavandadi, PhD**, Grant Award: **Interpersonal Functioning and Well-Being in Parkinson's Disease: A Dyadic Analysis of Veterans and their Caregivers**, PVAMC Parkinson's Disease Research, Education and Clinical Center (PADRECC) Pilot Program

This study explores both PD caregivers' and patients' perceptions of positive and negative aspects of their relationship and the extent to which interpersonal functioning is related to physical and mental health outcomes.

##### **Jeffrey Yao, PhD**, Grant Award: **Phospholipid-Arachidonate-Eicosanoid Signaling in Schizophrenia**, CSR&D VA Merit

This project will determine whether abnormalities in cell membrane phospholipids and arachidonic acid signaling are responsible for reduced sensitivity to the skin flush effect of niacin, which represents an important physiological subtype within the etiologically complex syndrome of the schizophrenias. The results could lead to improved methods for early detection of the illness, and possibly, new types of treatment.

##### **Stanley Caroff, MD** (Site-PI), Grant Award: **Cognitive Remediation in the Schizophrenia Trials Network (CRSTN)**, Clinical Antipsychotic Trials of Intervention Effectiveness (CATIE)-NIMH

This is a controlled trial that aims to randomly assign patients with schizophrenia or schizoaffective disorder to either a cognitive remediation program or a control program. Recent work on the effects of cognitive remediation suggests that this approach may demonstrate moderate efficacy in improving cognition in schizophrenia.

##### **Robert Sweet, MD**, Grant Award: **Cortical Synapses and Psychosis in AD**, BLR&D VA Merit

Psychotic symptoms such as delusions and hallucinations are common in individuals affected by Alzheimer disease, causing excess cognitive impairment and disability for these individuals and substantial distress for their family members. This study will examine the brain pathology underlying psychosis in Alzheimer disease, asking whether psychotic symptoms are associated with impairments of structure and biochemistry of synapses in the cerebral cortex.

### Selected Recent Publications

**Goldstein G, Luther JF, Haas GL, Gordon AJ, Appelt C.** Comorbidity between psychiatric and general medical disorders in homeless veterans. *Psychiatr Q.* 2009 Jul 14.

Ravina B, Elm J, Camicioli R, Como PG, Marsh L, Jankovic J, **Weintraub D.** The course of depressive symptoms in early Parkinson's disease. *Movement Disorders* 24;1306-1311, 2009.

### Selected Education Activities

#### Recent Events:

##### **Evidence-Based Intervention DVDs**

We are pleased to announce that earlier this year production was completed on a 4-DVD set containing presentations from the June 2006 *Evidence-Based Interventions for Suicidal Persons Conference* held in Atlantic City, NJ, a collaboration of the VISN 3, VISN 4, and VISN 19 Mental Illness Research, Education, and Clinical Centers (MIRECCs), the VISN 2 Center of Excellence (COE), the Department of Veterans Affairs Employee Education System, and the Chesapeake Health Education Program, Inc. (CHEP). The DVDs include national leaders in the areas of *Pharmacologic Interventions* (Herbert Meltzer, J. John Mann), the *Consumer Perspective* (Fred Frese), *Interpersonal Psychotherapy* (Mark Miller), *Dialectical Behavior Therapy* (Beth Brodsky) and *Cognitive Behavioral Therapy/Latest Research Findings* (Gregory Brown, Amy Wenzel).

Copies of the DVD set were distributed nationally to VA Suicide Prevention Coordinators and the MIRECC Education Group. The DVD containing Fred Frese's *Consumer Perspective* presentation was sent to Local Recovery Coordinators.

To request a copy of the DVDs, contact Sara Chapman, MS, OTR/L at [sara.chapman@va.gov](mailto:sara.chapman@va.gov).

#### Did you know... ?

**...that the VISN 4 MIRECC is currently in the process of overhauling our website.  
Keep a look out for the new and improved site!**

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